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1914

THE GATE OF DREAMS

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A PLAY IN ONE ACT

By

DION CLAYTON CALTHROP ✓
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THE GATE OF DREAMS

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

BY

DION CLAYTON CALTHROP

Produced in August, 1911, at The Coliseum, London, by Norman McKinnel with the following cast:—

PENELOPE LAVENDAR *Miss Hilda Trevelyan.*

ROBERT SHAW (her grandfather) *Mr. Ralph Hutton.*

ROSE SHAW (her grandmother) *Miss Lilian Mason.*

CAPTAIN VERMEER (Southern Army) *Mr. Edmund Kennedy.*

VALENTINE DRISCOLL (Northern Secret Service) *Mr. C. M. Hallard.*

SERGEANT BUNBURY *Mr. Fred Hunter.*

Soldiers. An old nigger woman.

The scene represents the Shaws' garden in the Southern States, at the commencement of the War between North and South America.

THE GATE OF DREAMS

It is a fine sunny afternoon in May, and the old garden is quiet and peaceful. On the right one sees a big openwork iron gate between red brick walls, the tops of which are covered with stone crop and wallflowers. An espalier fruit tree in full blossom is on the upper wall, at the foot of which is a bed of pink tulips. Over the tops of the walls big trees show on the right and left.

Across the centre is a deep cut hedge, in the centre of which is an arbour with seats right in the shadow. Next to this arbour is an opening in the hedge through which one sees a level lawn and another trim hedge at the back. The hedge continues across the left and has a cut archway left (down stage) leading to the house. Under this is another neat bed of yellow tulips. And straight across the front of the stage are two circular beds, box edged, with young green shoots coming up out of the earth.

The backcloth shows a mass of fruit trees in bloom, and above them a corner of a Georgian house, and above all a redbrick church with a white-faced sundial.

As the curtain rises one sees ROSE SHAW seated asleep on a garden chair. Her crochet work is in her lap and a work-basket is on a little wooden table by her side.

The church clock chimes the hour, very slowly, and then strikes three o'clock.

The old lady is dressed in the full skirt of the sixties, made of deep lavender-coloured cotton.

Just as the hour has struck one hears the voice of old ROBERT SHAW from the inner garden.

ROBERT (*calling out*). Dash my wig—Dash my wig and whiskers! Drat it!

(MRS. SHAW *wakes up and listens.*)

Dash my wig——

ROSE (*calling to him*). Robert dear—Robert. Language!

(*Enter ROBERT SHAW through the c. way. He is holding his right hand with his left, nursing it. He is dressed in nankeen trousers, a flowered waistcoat, and a big straw hat. He is in his shirt sleeves.—Quite an old man with a brown cheerful face, now twisted with pain.*)

ROBERT. My dear Rose,—my dear,—most unforeseen—— Drat!

ROSE. I'm quite in the dark, my dear Robert.

ROBERT. So was the bee, my dear—so was this confounded bee. . . . I was playing a little game of bowls by myself and inadvertently I placed my hand upon a ball that was already occupied by a bee. The result being—drat the thing!—that I have lost my pipe, and I have lost my temper. I have only the satisfaction of knowing that the bee is no more—he has gone from us, but he has left a very painful memory behind. . . . Drat the thing.

ROSE. The blue bag, my dear—my poor man—the blue bag, quickly. Go into the house and Penelope will apply the blue bag at once. . . . Always efficacious.

ROBERT. Penelope. . . . Is the dear child in the house?

ROSE. Yes, you will find her making cakes in the kitchen. Hurry, Robert, before the poison has time to take effect.

ROBERT (*moving off c.*). Will some one kindly search for my pipe?

ROSE. Yes, dear, yes.

(*Exit ROBERT.*)

(*ROSE takes up her work, beginning to count her stitches.*)

(*At this moment one hears sharp military orders given from outside, R. It is CAPTAIN VERMEER speaking. Then a tramp of men. ROSE looks up.*)

VERMEER (*off*). Halt! Sergeant Bunbury, surround this garden. Send men back and front. Watch every entrance. . . . Waste no time.

ROSE (*putting on her glasses*). Most extraordinary.

(*Enter, through the iron gates, CAPTAIN VERMEER, dusty and hot, in the uniform of the South. After him a number of men who stand at attention.*)

(*VERMEER salutes. ROSE rises and bows.*)

CAPTAIN VERMEER. You must pardon me, madam, for this sudden intrusion on your quiet. There is a man here, a spy——

ROSE. A spy?

VERMEER. Yes, madam, a spy. . . . You are doubtless aware that we are at war with the North.

ROSE. We have heard rumours. But this is a very isolated place.

VERMEER. I am only here, madam, to carry out my orders. I am afraid I must ask you to allow my men to search your house and garden.

ROSE. Oh!—but the house was only cleaned this morning.

VERMEER. I fear me that you do not quite understand. . . . A spy, a Northerner, came through over lines last night, was seen, caught, but has escaped. . . . He has been tracked here. I am grieved, but——

ROSE. No man has been here.

VERMEER (*turning to his men*). Through the garden and house—every room. Report to me here. If he shows fight get him alive if you can, if not——

ROSE. Sir, indeed I cannot have this—this unwarrantable intrusion. I am an old woman, sir, and I give you my word that no man has entered here.

VERMEER. I am deeply grieved, but these are my orders. . . . March!

(The men disperse through the garden, leaving ROSE and VERMEER alone.)

VERMEER. Captain Vermeer—at your service. These things are bound to happen in war time, madam.

ROSE. I—I—oh! it is too dreadful.

(PENELOPE'S voice is heard calling from the house.)

PENELOPE. Granny—Granny, the cakes are finished.

ROSE *(to VERMEER)*. My grand-daughter. . . . It will shock her horribly.

PENELOPE *(calling)*. Granny—

(Enter PENELOPE through C. entrance. She stares at VERMEER, who salutes.)

ROSE. My pretty—oh, it is most terrible—

PENELOPE *(eagerly)*. But soldiers—why soldiers?

VERMEER. I have been explaining to—to this lady.

PENELOPE. Mrs. Shaw—my grandmother.

VERMEER. To Mrs. Shaw—that we have traced a man to this village. We have searched all the village—except this house.

PENELOPE. A man? What sort of man?

VERMEER. You have heard that War has been declared?

PENELOPE. Oh, we are not so behindhand as all that. We heard yesterday.

VERMEER. We have been fighting for two months.

PENELOPE. Then we are a little backward, aren't we?

VERMEER. I am afraid, ladies, that you do not realize the seriousness of the situation. Since we proclaimed our Confederation at Richmond, Virginia,

the South as an united whole have been up in arms to uphold the honour and integrity of our States. We shall fight to the death.

ROSE. Terrible. Terrible.

VERMEER. If we wish to have the right to live, madam, we must be ready to have the honour to die.

PENELOPE. Oh, how splendid, Colonel.

VERMEER (*flattered*). Captain only—Captain Vermeer.

PENELOPE. I am so sorry—I thought you must be a Colonel.

VERMEER. I hope to be in time. . . . What's that?

(*He draws his pistol.*)

(*Enter ROBERT, his right hand bound up in a blue rag.*)

ROBERT. I don't know what the world's coming to—men all over my study—men in uniform in the kitchen—men in the dining-room—men in the drawing-room, in the drawing-room, Rose, actually—dusty, dishevelled—

PENELOPE. Grandfather—this is Captain Vermeer.

ROBERT. Perhaps you can explain—

PENELOPE (*much elated*). There is a war. . . . We are fighting for liberty.

ROBERT. Tut-tut. I know that—but I've heard nothing of it lately.

VERMEER. Let me explain, sir. A Northerner, a spy, has escaped. He was traced here. It is our duty to search for him. I am afraid you will find, sir, that as time goes on the whole country will be enveloped in this—unless we smash these brutes.

PENELOPE. A spy!—I had forgotten the spy. How splendid! How plucky! I hope you won't find him. . . . Anyhow you won't find him here. No man ever comes here, not even a spy. It is too dull.

(The clock chimes the quarter.)

VERMEER. It will not be dull for long, I think.

PENELOPE. You don't know, Captain Vermeer, we have a capacity for dulness that amounts to genius. But this—this is an adventure. Tell us about him. Is he good-looking?

ROSE. Penelope!

PENELOPE. Oh, Granny—I shouldn't mind if he squinted if he was only a stranger. This, sir, is really Sleepy Hollow. All our heroes are in books, none of them ever come here in flesh and blood.

ROSE. My dear Penelope, what dreadful language!

PENELOPE. I am sorry, Granny, but this is so exciting. . . . What does a spy do? Have we any?

VERMEER. Certainly. Both sides have their Secret Service. Plucky fellows, but of course they carry their lives in their hands.

It is not child's play—spying.

PENELOPE. I can guess. I—I remember I have read in other wars what men did. Disguises, long nights in the open, danger, courage—wonderful great men.

(Enter SERGEANT BUNBURY, followed by several men.)

VERMEER. Well?

SERGEANT. No trace, sir.

VERMEER. No trace.—Annoying. Call the men back.

(The SERGEANT goes through the c. arch and is heard calling.)

SERGEANT. Fall in.

(The men file through the garden and out of the iron gateway.)

(VERMEER salutes and is about to go. ROSE stops him.)

ROSE. I must beg your pardon. We are for-

getting ourselves. Penelope, my dear, the sherry wine and cake.

VERMEER. Pray do not trouble.

ROSE. I could not let you leave my house without a glass of wine.

PENELOPE (*as she goes off*). And I made the cakes—so you—must stay.

ROBERT (*to VERMEER*). You will observe, Captain Vermeer, that I am unable to shake you by the hand. I have had an unfortunate scene with a bee this very afternoon which has rendered me temporarily *hors de combat*—a military expression, I believe.

VERMEER. An honourable wound, sir.

ROSE. We keep bees.

VERMEER. Yes, yes—most interesting.

(*Enter PENELOPE with an old black woman SLAVE who carries a tray. This she places on the table and exits.*)

ROBERT. Now, sir—a glass of wine.

(*He pours out two glasses and offers one to VERMEER, who takes it.*)

ROSE (*as ROBERT takes up his glass*). Robert—gout.

ROBERT. I defy the enemy. . . . The South, sir.

VERMEER. God for the right.

PENELOPE. Cake—do soldiers eat cake?

VERMEER. We take all the good things life has to offer.

PENELOPE. Oh, I wish I were a man!

ROSE. I think, dear, you are rather over excited.

(*VERMEER puts down his glass.*)

PENELOPE. Over excited! Who wouldn't be to-day? Soldiers—spies—war. Fancy real live things coming into sleepy, sleepy places like this garden! It is like a little sunlight let into a prison.

. . . There, Granny, I don't mean it, only sometimes—sometimes I wish I wasn't wrapped in cotton wool.

ROSE. My dear!

VERMEER. I must thank you for your kind hospitality. . . . Now I must ride on. We shall catch this fellow before long—he was spent as it was.

PENELOPE (*eagerly*). And if you catch him?

VERMEER (*shrugs his shoulders*). We—oh well, we have to do our duty. . . . Good-bye, ladies. Good-bye, sir. And, again, thank you. I hope my men haven't done any real damage.

(*He salutes and goes out by the iron gate.*)

PENELOPE. All my dreams go out by that gate.

ROSE. Most unmaidenly, Penelope. Now that that is over we can return to the peace and quiet of our ways. . . . By the way, my dear, was that the best sherry?

PENELOPE. The very best, Granny.

ROSE. He looked hungry, poor young man. I wonder who darns his socks now.

PENELOPE (*with emphasis*). He smelt of gunpowder.

ROSE. I never knew you so imaginative before, child. . . . Young ladies should never have imaginations, they are so misleading.

ROBERT. A fine young fellow. I should like to have shown him my melons. I think I will go and look at my melons, this sun should ripen anything.

PENELOPE. Beware of the bees. They have stings like—like bayonets.

ROSE. Now, dear, no more dreaming. . . . You shall take away the cake and sherry while I go to attend to the ravages on my clean floors. Their feet were very dusty.

(*She moves away to left exit.*)

And, Penelope, after that I think you might lie down for a while.

(*Exit ROSE.*)

ROBERT. A wonderful woman, your grandmother. . . . There, my dear, quite a little excitement, but it is over now.

(Exit ROBERT c.)

PENELOPE. It is over now. Is that all I shall ever see of life?

(A bird sings. She moves to the tray. The clock strikes the half-hour.)

(Enter, by the iron gate, a tattered figure of a MAN—a fine man, burnt with the sun, and dusty with hard travelling. His coat sleeve is torn, and his shirt soaked with blood. He sees PENELOPE, and starts to go quietly away. PENELOPE turns.)

VALENTINE. Keep quiet. . . . Is any one here? Have they gone?

PENELOPE. The soldiers?

VALENTINE. Yes, the soldiers.

PENELOPE. I know who you are. The spy.

VALENTINE. Yes, I'm the wild beast. . . . Here, quickly. Come here, I shan't hurt you. How long have they gone? Long?

PENELOPE. A few moments.

VALENTINE. What's that—cake?

(He moves quickly to the tray and begins to devour the cake. She pours out a glass of wine. He sits down by the table.)

PENELOPE. What's your name?

VALENTINE. Do you want to know?

PENELOPE. Yes. Very much.

VALENTINE. Valentine Driscoll. I shan't want it long—it will be forgotten. They don't afford tombstones for us, the ditch is good enough. . . . Get me a change of clothes, money, and more food. Can you?

PENELOPE. I don't know. . . . You are safe here for a little while.

(He suddenly falls back in his chair.)

VALENTINE *(half dazed)*. A hundred and thirty miles. I killed the horse.

PENELOPE. You—oh, you are splendid!

VALENTINE. There—what——

(His head drops.)

PENELOPE. Oh, you are wounded!

VALENTINE. It's nothing, is it? Some brute winged me—I think—I don't know. I'm numb all over. . . . I'd forgotten places like this existed.

(PENELOPE begins to tear the border from her petticoat.)

VALENTINE. What are you doing?

PENELOPE. You are wounded. Please—your arm.

(He looks stupidly at his arm and sees the blood on his shirt.)

VALENTINE. That's nothing. . . . Get some clothes for me, like a good girl. . . . Anything.

(She takes his arm and begins to bind it up.)

You're very kind. . . . You realize who I am—I'm an enemy, you know. Ah! It smarts. Fellow took a long shot. I expect they have tracked me by the blood, but I doubled. . . . What did they say?

PENELOPE. They searched the house and garden, and then they left. . . . There, is that more comfortable?

(He stands up.)

VALENTINE. Fine. . . . Can you get me some clothes? The money doesn't matter so much. I must go. I must go. I'm all right now. You're a good girl.

PENELOPE. I think you are wonderful.

(One sees now that she has a long bright stain of blood on her dress.)

VALENTINE. Oh no, I'm not wonderful. It's all

part of the job, my dear. Secret service isn't a bed of lilies. It generally means a ditch and thorns. I spent two days last week up to my neck in a river, not daring to move. Got off that time. Got off this time. Next time—well, one doesn't think about next time very much. Now, can you get me those things—something old. Who lives here?

PENELOPE. My grandparents and myself. I'm an orphan.

VALENTINE. A coat of your grandfather's will do. I can hide about here, somewhere near the river. Then, to-night, a long, long ride. There, come closer. You're a nice girl, there's a kiss for your pains. . . . Now hurry up.

(He kisses her, and she stands still, wondering.)

PENELOPE. No one has ever kissed me before.

VALENTINE. Do you like it?

PENELOPE. Don't. Don't. Don't spoil everything. . . . I'll see what I can get.

(She moves away. As she does so one hears the tramp of men and a voice calling in the distance.)

VALENTINE. God!—what's that?

PENELOPE. The soldiers. . . . You must hide somewhere. Look—there! The arbour. I'll send them away. . . . Quickly. Oh, quickly!

(He hurries to the arbour and goes inside. She dashes at her grandmother's work, takes a chair to the arbour and sits down in front of it, and begins to crochet. One sees the long stain of blood quite clearly on her skirt.)

(Enter the CAPTAIN and his men. He salutes PENELOPE.)

PENELOPE. You are back again, Captain Vermeer.

VERMEER. I am. . . . Sergeant—the garden and house as before.

(The men divide and go out through both exits towards the house.)

PENELOPE. Again?

VERMEER. The man is here.

PENELOPE (*laughing*). How suspicious you are of us! My grandmother will be really offended this time.

(*VERMEER is looking down at her dress, and moves quite close to her.*)

VERMEER. Miss Penelope—

PENELOPE. Why do you look so stern?

VERMEER. There is a penalty for harbouring a spy.

PENELOPE. So there ought to be. . . . We shan't have to suffer it.

VERMEER. You tell me he is not here. I say he is.

PENELOPE. Captain Vermeer—

VERMEER. You cannot deny it.

(*PENELOPE stands up across the front of the arbour.*)

PENELOPE. We gave you our word of honour before—I give it you again. No man is here, nor has any man been here since you came.

VERMEER. You are playing with something very much larger and more dreadful than you understand.

PENELOPE. My word of honour. Before—before God.

(*He points to her dress.*)

PENELOPE. You take my word—my word of honour?

VERMEER. Miss Penelope—I am very sorry. Look—

(*She looks down at her skirt and sees the blood.*)

PENELOPE. Blood—on my dress . . . I—I—I have cut my hand. It's an accident. It— You must believe me.

VERMEER. Come now, at once—where is he?

PENELOPE. He—he's gone.

VERMEER. Then stand away from that arbour.

PENELOPE. I will not.

VERMEER. Stand aside, now, at once. . . .
Don't you see what it means?

(He puts out his hand.)

PENELOPE. Don't dare to touch me. You shan't. I stand here because I want to. If you were a gentleman you'd go. . . . I tell you he has gone—long ago.

VERMEER. Move away—or I shall fire straight over your shoulder.

(He takes out his pistol.)

PENELOPE *(starting forward)*. Don't do that.

VERMEER. He is there, behind you.

(VALENTINE pushes past PENELOPE and stands facing VERMEER. PENELOPE cries out.)

VALENTINE. Captain Vermeer, at your service—
Call your men.

(PENELOPE goes down on her knees to the CAPTAIN.)

PENELOPE. You shall not take him. You shan't take him away from me. He's mine. He kissed me. I love him. I love him so—you mustn't take him away. He is my husband in the sight of God. Oh, don't take him away. Captain Vermeer, he shan't fight any more, I'll promise you that. I'll look after him. He is my man.

VALENTINE. Hush, little girl, hush!

PENELOPE. He's brave, and strong, and alive. You shall not hurt him. I've waited for him for years—for my man. You shan't take him away. . . . Captain Vermeer, you must listen. I love him—do you hear, I love him. He is all, all I've got. Don't hurt him. Give him to me. I'll give you anything, anything in the world I can for him. . . . You must see. You do see, don't you? Oh, don't you? He is mine. You can't take away what is mine. I want to nurse him. I will be your friend always. If you—if you—— But you won't. What

will you do with him? If you make him a prisoner, make me one too. I'll go with him.

VERMEER. Miss Penelope—my duty.

PENELOPE. What do I care for your duty? This is above duty. . . . Run, Valentine, run. I'll hold him.

VALENTINE. Little girl, you don't know what you are saying. They don't make prisoners of us who are caught red-handed—there isn't time.

PENELOPE. What do you mean?

VALENTINE (to VERMEER). Tell her. I can't.

VERMEER. We have very strict orders, Miss Penelope. I am very, very sorry.

(She rises and looks into his face, and reads the Death Sentence written there.)

PENELOPE. You—you are going to shoot him?

VERMEER. Won't you go away and leave us, Miss Penelope?

PENELOPE. Leave you—you murderer. You shall not shoot him—not while I'm alive. I hate you, and your duty, and your hardness. He came into my garden, into my life—and his life is mine. *(She begins to plead with him.)* You won't, will you? Not this once. Nobody will know. We'll hide him here, till it is all over. It is only one life we have let us be happy. I never knew what love was before to-day, and now you want to take it away from me—to break my heart. . . . You won't, will you?

VERMEER. My men are here.

PENELOPE. Tell them it is all a mistake. Tell them this is the wrong man. . . . What harm has he done? What harm can he have done? Valentine, speak to him. Do you understand?

VALENTINE. Captain Vermeer, may I speak to you?

VERMEER. Certainly.

(They step aside.)

VALENTINE. What does it mean? Outside. The wall.

VERMEER. Those are my orders. . . . I am sorry.

VALENTINE. Oh, that's the fortune of War. . . . May I have five minutes? I can't escape.

VERMEER. Five minutes.

PENELOPE. I can't bear it. . . . What are you saying?

(VERMEER goes off c.)

PENELOPE. He has let you off. . . . Now let me tell you quickly. You don't think I'm mad, do you? But I had to say—to say it then because I had no time to think—and because it is true.

VALENTINE. My dear, dear little girl. You must be brave. You have been wonderful. I'm not really much of a chap—nothing of what you think me. But your sweet words are very dear to me. I never guessed when I came in here that I was walking into a garden of love, a garden where I, by accident, picked the first flower. I want you to know that—that you have made it easier for me to—to die.

PENELOPE. To die!

VALENTINE. Yes. Don't cry. Don't think my life is of any value.

PENELOPE. To me—to me——

VALENTINE. My dear, you don't know me. You have made my last moments all glorious by the light of your love. I love you, too, my dear, but it's too late. Don't cry, we must be brave, you and I. I am giving my life for my flag. I'm no use, dear—I never was. You don't know me. But if I'd been a better man, or a luckier man, we should have met, before. It is not Vermeer's fault—don't blame him. The boy has got to do his duty. . . . Listen to me, my pretty one—when you meet the real good man tell him a poor devil loved you once. Keep this for a memory.

(He kisses her as she lies in his arms.)

PENELOPE. I always told myself that my man would come by that iron gate. He was a man of my dreams. It was you who came and took my heart at once. I've thought of all we would do, of our house, and our children, and the garden, and all the things I should tell you in the evenings over the fire. And I told myself that we should be so happy, and not like some married people always bickering, but always loving and gentle to each other. And in my dreams I used to watch that iron gate and stretch out my arms to it, longing and longing for the man who never came. And now—— Tell me it's not true. . . . He won't take you away. This is my harbour, here in your arms. Say it isn't true about—about—your going away.

VALENTINE. Perhaps I may be allowed to carry the memory of this peace, and this garden, and you, across the border. . . . There, my darling . . . there——

(He kisses her again, and before she is aware VERMEER appears at the c. opening.)

VALENTINE. Ready. . . . Penelope, be strong.
VERMEER. Sergeant—the men.

(The men come through the garden and fall in to go out by the iron gate. PENELOPE stands dazed. Four men surround VALENTINE.)

As they march out a breeze blows on the fruit trees and covers VALENTINE with fallen blossom.)

(Exit all, leaving PENELOPE alone.)

(Enter, L., ROSE.)

ROSE. My dear Penelope, no wonder you——

PENELOPE. Hush! . . .

ROSE. My dear!

PENELOPE. Hush! . . .

(Enter ROBERT, C.)

ROBERT. A game of bowls, now it is all over.

PENELOPE. Quiet! quiet!

(Then one hears the orders from outside. "Ready—Present—Fire.")

The shots crash out. A branch of a fruit tree is snapped off and falls into the garden. Blossom comes down everywhere.)

ROSE. Oh, what is that?

PENELOPE. It is my wedding bells.

(Then the clock strikes four. And as the curtain slowly comes down, a bird begins to sing.)

CURTAIN.

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